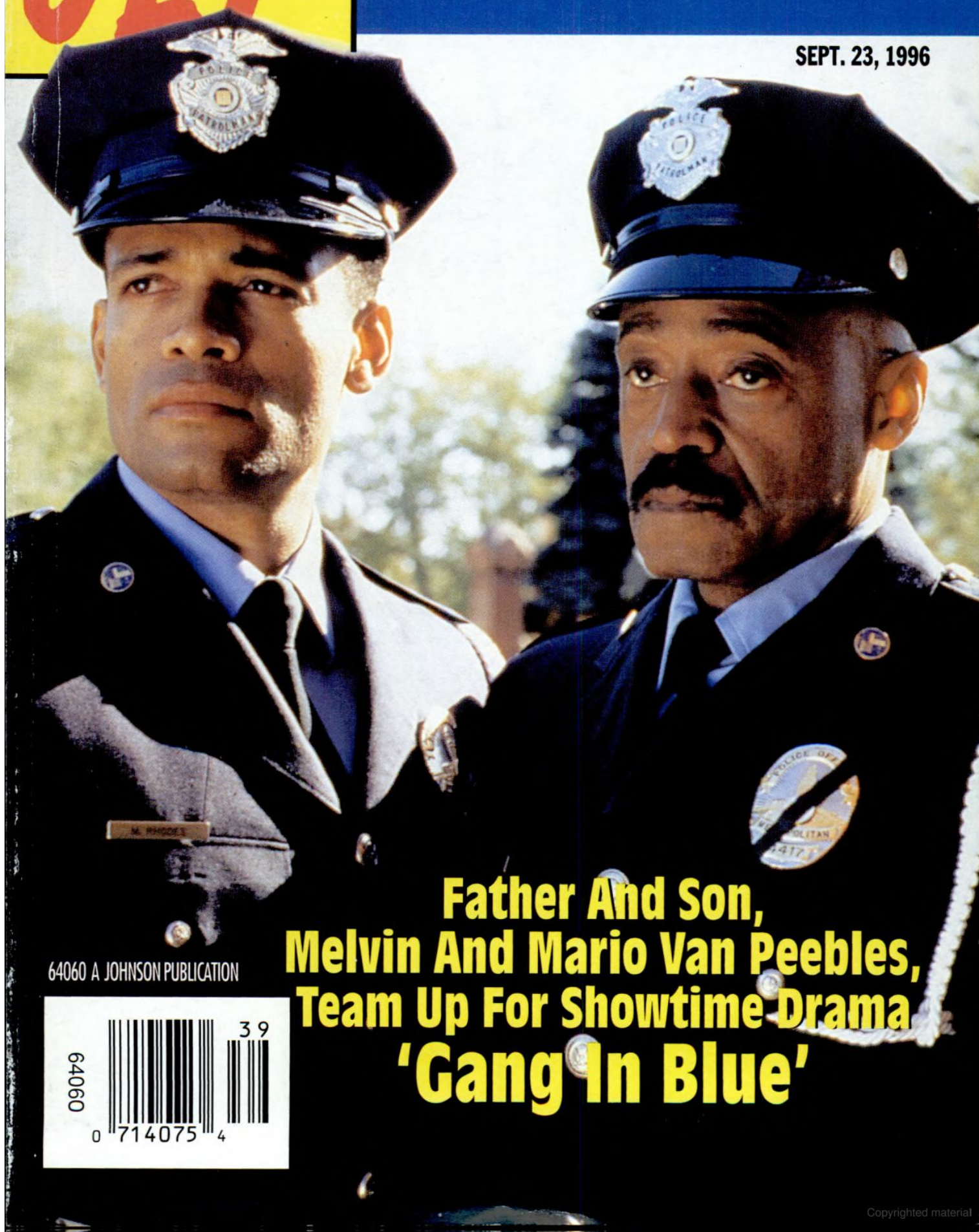


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Father and son, Melvin and Mario Van Peebles, recently teamed up for the Showtime drama *Gang In Blue*.

The duo directed, produced and starred in the intense police movie.

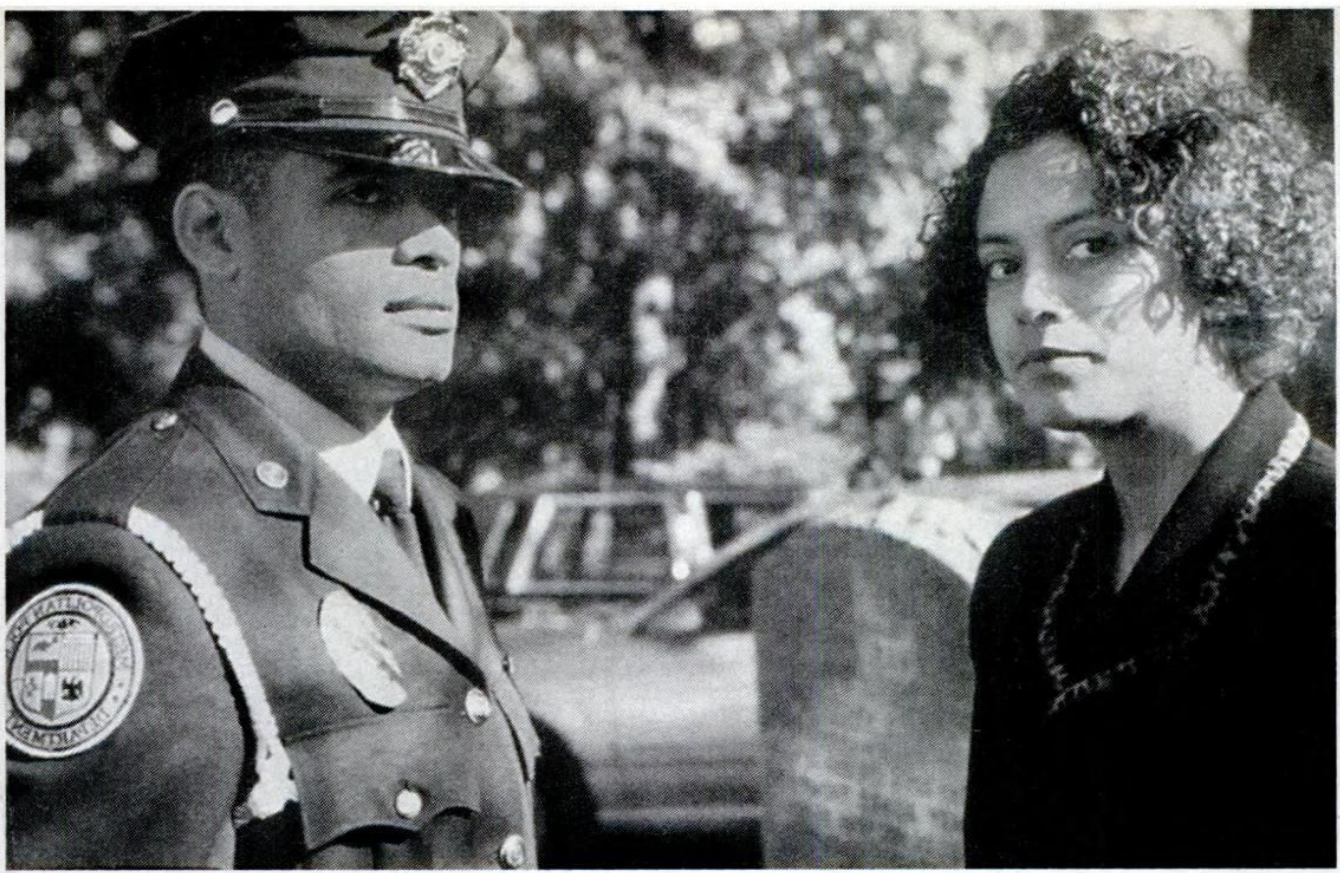
"This was a picture that was in development for a long time. It's going to be very controversial," Mario tells JET during a recent visit at Johnson Publishing Co. in Chicago. "This racist group of cops takes a license with beating minorities and doing harassings. It's controversial because it's so real."

Mario stars as Officer Michael Rhoades, a just and caring cop who refuses to overlook the corrupt and racist actions that a select group of White fellow officers partake in with minorities. The cold and brutal group

▲ Father and son filmmaking duo Melvin (above, r) and Mario Van Peebles star in the intense police drama *Gang In Blue*.

► Mario is Officer Michael Rhoades, a cop who battles racist officers in his department.





Rhoades and FBI agent Anita Bayard, played by Cynda Williams, attend the funeral of Rhoades' slain partner, Joe Beckstrom. Rhoades, who is Bayard's former lover, seeks her help in trying to put an end to the secret, White supremacist organization, The Phantoms.

of law enforcers are members of a secret, White supremacist organization called The Phantoms. The group acquires that name after avenging the death of a former member. The policemen use that slain officer's gun to kill his murderers in order to make it appear as if the dead officer's "ghost" or "phantom" had returned for payback.

In Rhoades' frustrating attempt to blow the whistle on the hate group to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), he finds himself marked for death by The Phantoms.

"I play a cop who is under a lot of pressure because he's trying to turn these guys in," reveals Mario.

Officer Andre Speier, played by Melvin, is Rhoades' friend, mentor and voice of reason in the midst of their racially tense police department.

"My character has brought Rhoades along," Melvin recently told JET in a phone interview from his New York office. "Rhoades is a little eager and prone to get into things a little deeper than he can handle. Andre is always, through his love for Rhoades, trying to caution him."

The veteran officer warns Rhoades that his reporting the ruthless officers to the FBI could prove fatally dangerous. Rhoades soon discovers that the wise Speier is correct when his White partner, Officer Joe Beckstrom, played by Zach Grenier, is killed during a raid on a drug gang, a set-up intended for Rhoades, whose bullets were removed from his gun prior to going to the raid.

Upon the death of Beckstrom, Rhoades requests a new partner, White rookie Officer Keith DeBruler,



▲ Veteran officer Andre Speier always “watches Rhoades’ back” by offering him sound advice. Speier is Rhoades’ voice of reason and cautions him about The Phantoms.

played by Josh Brolin. Rhoades, who believes that DeBruler is a new recruit in The Phantoms, is first suspicious and untrusting of his new partner, but he soon learns they have more in common than just

being partners.

DeBruler is also anxious to put a halt to the corruption caused by The Phantoms as he was planted in the department by the FBI in order to bring them down. And, his lover, FBI

▼ Moose Tavola, played by Stephen Lang, has one of his many nasty confrontations with Rhoades. Tavola takes pride in being a Phantom and doesn’t like Rhoades in his way.





▲Officer Keith DeBruler (l), played by Josh Brolin, has been assigned as Rhoades' partner by Sgt. William Eyler (r), played by J.T. Walsh. Eyler is also a member of *The Phantoms* and recruits DeBruler, who unbeknownst to him is an undercover officer for the FBI.

agent Anita Bayard, who put him on the case, is also the former girlfriend of Rhoades.

"It gets deep," Mario says with a laugh. "It gets wild."

Bayard is played by Cynda Williams, who starred opposite Denzel Washington and Wesley Snipes as the sexy blues singer Clarke Bentancourt in Spike Lee's 1990 film *Mo' Better Blues*.

Melvin observes that the movie's realistic theme is controversial because it deals with an issue that's often made headlines in the news. Gang in Blue-type organizations are currently under investigation in cities such as Philadelphia, Los Angeles, New York and New Orleans.

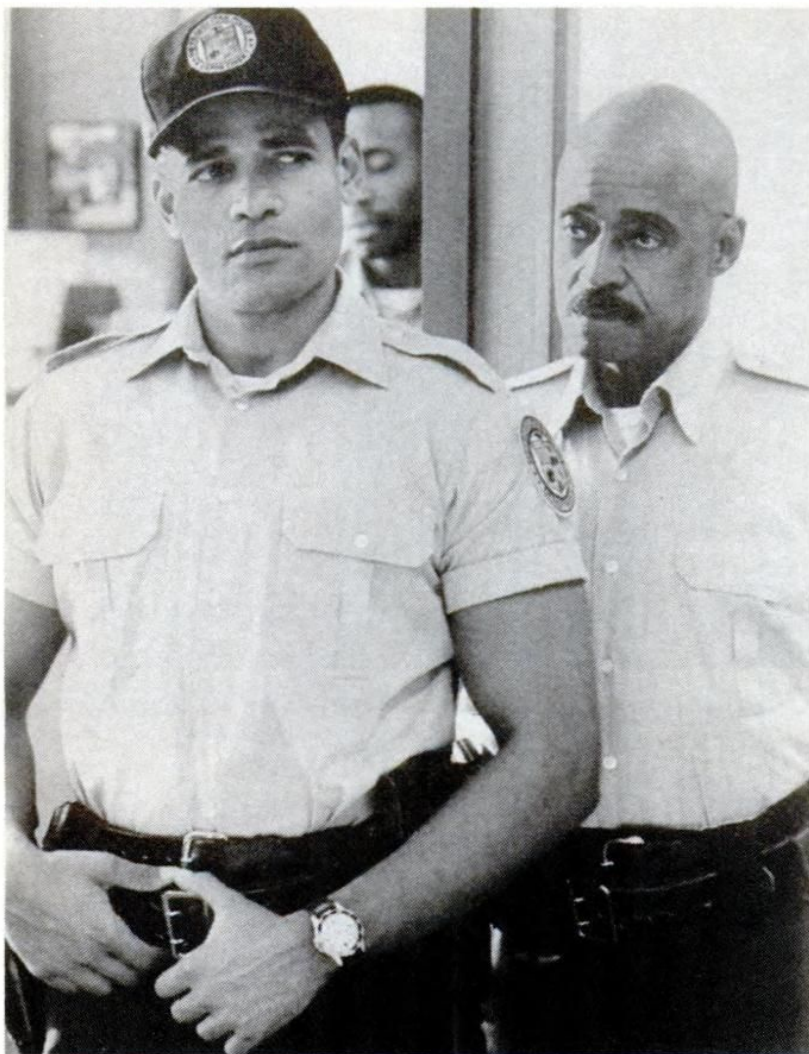
"This picture shows what happens if you take a couple of good cops when a Rodney King situation occurs. The good cops, who happen to

be Black, know who did it," explains Mario. "How do they respond? Their people are against them now because they are Black and 'Blue.' Their fellow cops are against them, and they know who did it. What do they do when the gang wears blue?"

The film also stars J.T. Walsh, Stephen Lang and Sean McCann.

Education and entertainment, or "edutainment" if you will, has become synonymous with the father and son producing-directing-acting team. They were especially careful in making sure that they upheld their beliefs when working on this project.

"The truth is controversial. Many times scripts continue to get watered down in some way, and that's not what we wanted to do. This says this is what's happening. This is not an isolated event at all but happening all over," insists Melvin.



▲ Rhoades and Speier stand strong in their pursuit of harmony in their police department, despite the many obstacles they face.

He adds: "Many times if you don't bring issues before the public and just continue to sweep them under the rug, then they just stay under that rug."

Last year the younger Van Peebles directed and co-produced the highly controversial, powerful movie *Panther*. The movie's script was based on Melvin's novel about the Black Panther Party. Melvin was also a co-producer of the film along with Preston Holmes. The movie chronicled the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party.

In 1993, Mario directed and starred in the popular Western film *Posse*, in which his father also appeared.

"There aren't a lot of second generation filmmakers. I love to see us passing it on," muses Mario about his relationship with his father.

And, his father agrees. "Many times we've worked together but never really have made the relationship as clear as we have in this case. It's quite unusual to have co-directors and pretty unusual to have co-directors in a Black family," emphasizes Melvin. "You see us doing what some of the White families have never even done."

While the younger Van Peebles definitely relishes his opportunity to work with the man who changed his diapers and "opted not to have all the finest clothes" so that he could send him to Columbia University in New York, where he earned a degree in economics, Mario doesn't hesitate to add that they don't always see eye to eye when it comes to working on a film.

"Sometimes we get hot and disagree. We'll go off one on one and figure it out. Then, we'll come back with some result," continues Mario.

"Sometimes he's right, and sometimes, of course, I'm usually right," Melvin adds with a hearty laugh.

The talented twosome recently completed work on another Showtime movie, *Riot*, which tells the story of the 1992 Los Angeles riots from four different points of view.